

What Is a Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan is a land use document that provides the framework and policy direction for land use decisions. Under Washington state's Growth Management Act (GMA), the plans contain the following chapters: land use, transportation, housing, capital facilities, utilities, shorelines, and rural (for counties). Chapters addressing economic development and parks and recreation also are required, if state funding is provided. Optional chapters may be included such as: conservation, energy, recreation, and subarea plans where appropriate.

Comprehensive plans identify where and how growth needs will be met. Adjacent jurisdictions are required to have plans that are consistent. These plans then provide the basis for many of the policies, regulation, and budget decisions that cities and counties will make.

Some of the benefits of having effective GMA comprehensive plans:

- Cities and counties integrate decisions about land uses, transportation, water capacity, public facilities, natural resources, environmental protection, economic development, housing and other issues.**
- Fiscal accountability is built into GMA plans. Local governments identify the capital facility needs, along with estimated costs and revenues for each facility. Planning for these facilities is linked with land use decisions about the location and density of population growth.**
- Developers and citizens know what to expect as communities make clear decisions and as jurisdictions coordinate with each other and with local districts that provide service.**

Here are a few highlights from plans that have been submitted:

- Citizens and affected organizations have extensive opportunities for participation in the planning process. While this may raise the level of conflict, it also ensures a more public framework for making local decisions.**
- Counties and cities are paying greater attention to coordination between utility providers and local jurisdictions. This results in more efficient service provision.**
- Many communities are reducing sprawl development that would otherwise result in higher costs for transportation and other services, as well as unnecessary compromise of natural resource lands.**

Most communities planning under the GMA have completed their first comprehensive plans. They are carrying out the goals and policies of the plans

through development regulations. Under the GMA, development regulations are to be consistent with the comprehensive plan.

The comprehensive plans developed by communities throughout the state include a variety of ways to provide for growth over a 20-year period.

Some local governments are now monitoring their plans to make sure the goals and policies adopted are managing growth in a way that will achieve their vision for the future. Under the GMA, communities are to continually review and evaluate their comprehensive plans. They are to review and, if necessary, revise their comprehensive plans at least every seven years to make sure they meet the goals and requirements of the GMA. The earliest deadline for some counties and cities for completing this requirement is December 1, 2004. Local governments can amend comprehensive plans once a year.



Port Townsend's comprehensive plan includes policies on how to preserve historic properties. Link to Port Townsend's comprehensive plan:

<http://www.mrsc.org/mc/porttownsplans/ptcompplan.pdf>



Renton's comprehensive plan addresses downtown revitalization.

Link to Renton's comprehensive plan:

<http://www.ci.renton.wa.us/ednsp/straplandiv.htm>



Chelan County's comprehensive plan sets out goals and policies for protecting critical areas. Link to Chelan County's comprehensive plan:
<http://www.co.chelan.wa.us/bl/data/compplan.pdf>



The vision statement in Franklin County's comprehensive plan states how important the highly productive farmland is to its citizens and local economy. Link to Franklin County's comprehensive plan:
<http://www.co.franklin.wa.us/planning/>



Policies for promoting alternatives to the automobile are included in King County's comprehensive plan. Link to King County's comprehensive plan:
<http://www.metrokc.gov/ddes/compplan/>

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